



**Statement by His Excellency, Mr. Adama Barrow
President of the Republic of The Gambia
at the
Gambian Diaspora Town Hall Meeting**

**Theme:
Gambian Diaspora Engagement and Policy**

Date: 23th September 2017

Harriet Tubman Learning Center, New York City, USA

**(The meeting was scheduled as part of the government's official trip to the
72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly)**

The President of the Borough, Fellow Gambians

Let me begin by thanking the Almighty Allah for granting me this opportunity to once again stand before a gathering of Gambians in the diaspora away from home soil. This turnout, I must admit is the largest ever gathering of Gambians in the diaspora that I ever had the privilege to address.

I thank you all for the warm welcome. I meet you as fellow citizens, I greet you as friends, I see you as partners in Gambian development. Fellow Gambians, it is my singular honour and privilege to engage with you. I bring to you, the warmest family greetings from our beloved country. Some of you are regular visitors to The Gambia and others have suffered the pain of isolation of exile, caused by 22 years of dictatorship. Yet all of you through different ways have maintained your emotional and developmental ties to our great country.

On behalf of the government and the people of The Gambia, and indeed on my own behalf, I express gratitude to you for your continued and enormous contributions to national development. During the last two decades of dictatorship, you may have hated the brutal government, but you continued to love your country. The diaspora contributed ideas and finances, demonstrated fortitude and tenacity, and used its networks and privileges to help deliver our country from oppression. As a resource, you have covered yourselves in glory, and history will attest to your courage and commitment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, now that we are in an era of democratic transition, I have no doubt that your commitment to national development will increase. I strongly hope that you will be able to work closely with the coalition government, so that your inputs and efforts are enhanced and multiplied, leading to a rapid, inclusive and sustainable development. I am here in New York, attending the Seventy-

Second session of the United Nations General Assembly. The UN recognises the connection between migration, diaspora and development, a fact reflected in Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is therefore appropriate for me to take the opportunity of this official trip, to outline how my government plans to work with the diaspora, for Gambia's development.

In the past six months, I as president, the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other ministers and officials of the government have had many meetings with groups and individuals from the diaspora. We have listened to your hopes and aspirations. We have heard your concerns and frustrations. Now, we are working with experts and partners, who have helped us develop meaningful 'Diaspora Engagement Action Points' as part of a programme for 'Migration and Sustainable Development in The Gambia'. The immediate and short-term diaspora engagement activities include, amongst other proposals:

- Research and consultation exercise with the Gambia diaspora, regarding the drafting of a 10-year Diaspora Strategy (2018-27);
- Identification of priorities within the Diaspora Strategy, to be implemented within a 3-year time period (2018-21);
- Design and structuring of a Diaspora Directorate, as a service-delivery unit, to facilitate interface between government and the diaspora;
- Budgeting and resource mobilisation for the Gambia Diaspora Directorate for the 2018/19 fiscal year, tapping central government and partner funds;
- Training of senior government officials and other stakeholders on how to support the diaspora;

- Launching of an initiative by Central Bank of The Gambia and partners, to reduce the transaction cost of remittances to the minimal level possible;
- Inauguration of an annual ‘Stake in the Nation Forum’, to mark the declaration and start of ‘Gambian Diaspora Month’, to take place every year between 15 December to 15 January.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us be ready and willing to engage in productive dialogue, constructive criticism and to make wise compromises within an environment of mutual respect, even if we disagree. This is very much in line with what I told my cabinet colleagues at the first cabinet meeting in April, that as President, I will strongly defend the role of dissenting voices and I expect all members to abide by this basic democratic principle. However when we disagree, it is important to build consensus necessary to achieve common denominator. It is only through this way that we can as a government meaningfully engage the diaspora in formal development and democratic processes for sustainable nation building. Therefore, I call on you to use your news media positively to influence government and society. My administration strongly believes that a government that listens and learns is a government that improves and succeed.

Fellow Gambians, the importance of remittances in boosting both family livelihoods and the national economy cannot be overemphasised. Yet Gambians will benefit significantly more, if Gambians have Diaspora Bonds and other viable forms of Diaspora Direct Investment. These will pool together diaspora finances, to fund specific national socio-economic and medium-scale infrastructure projects, whilst generating returns for the individual diaspora investors. I hope that in the coming years, the Gambian diaspora will have

increased confidence in our local financial institutions, such that they will keep a significant part of their savings in the country, thereby benefiting the national economy.

I congratulate the many Gambians in the diaspora who have taken up jobs in Gambia in the past few months. The need for their skills and experience is immense. I look forward to seeing an effective Gambia Diaspora Directorate which helps to attract many more Gambians in the diaspora to set up commercial and social enterprises, and other ventures which create decent jobs. There is always a risk in such decisions, but today, it is a worthwhile risk to take for The Gambia.

I am an example of one of the returning Gambians in the diaspora who took the risk to go home at a time of great uncertainty, to take in development of our country. On my return, I assessed the situation and decided to establish a real estate firm which was successful, giving me the opportunity to employ and empower many Gambians financially. Being self-employed, I was able to engage in community work and participate in grassroots politics thereby defeating the dictator through the political process. Today, Fellow Gambians, following the subsequent events, I am elected as the President of the Republic of The Gambia. As a former member of the Gambian diaspora in the UK, if I can do it, so can you. Gambia is open for business and I therefore encourage you all to consider taking part in the development of our beloved country in any positive way you find suitable.

To conclude, I encourage you all to continue to be good ambassadors of The Gambia and once again I thank you.